

Plays on Many Stages

'Cosi Fan Tutti' and Some Modern Plays Compared

Theory of the Theater That Comedy Should Not Be Injected Into Scenes Which Are of Dramatic Intent Dispersed by Present Day Playwrights.

By LAWRENCE REAMER.

AFTER all, the present age is less exacting than it might seem. The public of Vienna, which late in the eighteenth century was called upon to admire Mozart's music to "Cosi fan Tutti," one of the notable triumphs of the season at the Metropolitan Opera House, listened in delight to the measures of the composer, but was frankly scornful of the text which Lorenzo da Ponte had supplied. Learned commentators have told of the various efforts to eliminate this libretto which excited the impresarios of every country and nearly every period of operatic history since Vienna heard the work. Yet unsatisfactory as it may have been to the critics, Da Ponte's play suited the music better than any other. So it has survived down to our own day.

Joseph II. is said to have commanded the Viennese librettist to use the story, which is also said to have been the event of an actual flirtation of that day. Nowadays the sophisticated sneer at the naive view of a librettist who started out with the hypothesis that two women would fall to recognize their betrothed when they return to court them. Both have gone to the wars. Both have returned to prove that fickleness is the way of all women. Both lay siege to the hearts of the two ladies. Neither is recognized. They succeed in establishing the almost invariable weakness of woman under a vigorous courtship.

Terribly old fashioned, eh? Just as bad as all the critics say? Possibly only of course in such a rococo period of the theater as the eighteenth century! Are all these observations really founded on fact? How about Franz Molnar and his successful play called in its European form "The Life Guardsman"? Harrison Grey Fiske produced it here at the Lyceum Theater with Miss Rita Jolivet and William Courtleigh in the leading roles. The drama called "Where Ignorance Is Bliss" was given on a sultry night before an audience of bored routiners at such occasions. It made no impression and was soon withdrawn. It did not meet with favor in England, but swept triumphantly over the Continent.

Its story is concerned with a jealous husband, who comes back to his wife disguised as a soldier for the purpose of establishing her fidelity. She does not recognize him with the uniform and the changes in his appearance. She is indeed quite as lacking in acuteness as the two young ladies of Venice are in Da Ponte's text. She ought to have been superior to them after a quarter of a century in which to improve. She remains, however, just the same, which is an observation that may truthfully be made of the useful dramatic legends at all times.

'Lawful Larceny's' Time Schedule.

Samuel Shipman has made "Lawful Larceny," which seems to keep the Republic Theater constantly filled, a potent factor in such a happy managerial result by alternating comedy and serious emotion with unflinching effectiveness. One example of the method which keeps the public alternately engrossed and amused is provided by the conflict between Miss Gail Kane and Miss Margaret Lawrence. Miss Lawrence is in the play as a deserted wife who obtains employment in the home of Miss Kane, a more or less unconventional resident of Park avenue—dramatists have forsaken Riverside drive as the lair of the vamp—in order to revenge herself on the destroyer of her happiness. She begins by gaining the affection of Lowell Sherman. He is, for the purposes of the playwright, a lover of Miss Kane. She is at the billiard table with one of her numerous informal visitors to the house when Miss Lawrence summons her to learn that she is about to marry the one man of her heart. Her other conquests are by way of business.

Miss Kane enters to learn the reason why she has been called away from the game by her secretary, who stands resolutely in the center of the stage. She carries a billiard cue when she comes into the room. She is clutching it firmly. Mr. Sherman glances at it and shivers apprehensively. He is fearful of Miss Lawrence's fate. So adroitly slips up to the puzzled Amazon, apologetically takes the cue from her hand and leans it in a corner. Miss Lawrence is safe. The spectators know it. They burst into laughter, and the mood of the scene is for a minute altogether comic.

Next to these ingenious alterations of comedy and more serious moods there is nothing so absorbing in "Lawful Larceny" as the time schedule. The play seems to begin in the late afternoon. Two or three of the characters withdraw for dinner. Then there is an incessant action which must last until the early morning. There is nothing perhaps improbable in the continual va-et-vient of the household. Men come and go at all hours, but then it is that sort of a household. Existence there must be destructive to beauty, however, as the chateleine is also up all night. She is much upset by the discovery of her lover's disloyalty. She goes to her room escorted by one of the indispensable men friends. She will not, however, be comforted. After an interval she reappears to say that he cannot calm her and must take her out for a drive. By every plausible calculation it must then be 4 or 5 in the morning. What the scientists call internal evidence of this fact is provided by the incidents of the following act.

Miss Lawrence, having accomplished her purpose, is again, to the relief of her husband, at home. She has undoubtedly had what would be called a hard night. So her request for coffee is natural. Just how much she must have needed it is proved in the final lines of the play. When it is ready she invites her husband to share her breakfast. So it is presumably the hour for that meal, since he has presumably been up all night the audience sympathizes with their hearty appetite. Nothing would be more interesting to admirers of the play than an official time schedule of "Lawful Larceny." It would make the play absorbing, as it is now "nasty more valuable as a human document. Future generations would be envious to draw interesting conclusions as to the night life of Park avenue in this era.

Much as he may upset the conventional view of the purpose of the sleeping hours, Mr. Shipman is almost

as revolutionary in his alteration of the comic and the serious in his dramatic values. It used to be one of the theories of the theater that comedy should not be injected into scenes which were dramatic in intent. Bad taste was one of the charges made against the playwrights who did this sort of thing. The sense of a scene should be homogeneous. It had to keep in one mood. Such at least were the theories of the mandarins of yesterday.

Now the playwrights follow the exact reverse of this system of making their scenes. To add a jocund and snappy fall to a dramatic dog is the effort of every playwright. Half the success of "The Bat," which seems a theater permanence now, is due to the successful manner in which the public, its nerves raised to the point of shivering, is suddenly soothed by the skilled manipulation of the funny bone. There are other customs for other days in every act, especially in the noble art of the drama.

The Past of "Sally."

After seeing the piece tarry longer than any of the wise men of Broadway thought possible, Flo Ziegfeld is going to take "Sally" away from the New Amsterdam Theater and send her to Boston. Doubtless theater reminiscences will in the future frequently refer to "Sally" just as they now point to "Adonis" or "A Trip to Chinatown" or "Lightnin'" to draw some sort of a conclusion as to the rights of this or that kind of a play to occupy so much of the public's time.

So it will be of great service to their friends and to the editors who write letters to and the other persons they may take into their confidence if they will mark, learn and inwardly digest the following facts contained in an official history which has come from the chancellery of the New Amsterdam Theater concerning Mr. Ziegfeld's production:

"Sally" was first intended as a means of making a star out of Miss Marilyn Miller. It was Mr. Ziegfeld who after the first production suggested the part of the tipsy duke which made Leon Errol also a star in the piece, and it was written in after the manuscript had been delivered to Mr. Ziegfeld.

After a five weeks preliminary tour out of town, "Sally" was acted at the New Amsterdam Theater on December 22, 1920. It has run for seventy-two weeks, and it is estimated that the piece has been seen by nearly a million and a half people. Only once was

the theater not sold out, and on that night six seats were not bought. More than forty thousand standees were admitted during the run. The only change of cast from the first performance was the substitution of Miss Kathleen Martyn for Miss Mary Hay. Miss Dorothy Dickson is playing the title role in London and the other foreign cities to see "Sally" will be Paris, Berlin and Melbourne. The production at the New Amsterdam Theater was put on by Edward Royce under the direction of Mr. Ziegfeld.

Sothorn and Marlowe Appear in Newark

E. H. Sothorn and Miss Julia Marlowe will appear at the Broad Street Theater in Newark for one week beginning tomorrow night, with a matinee on Saturday only. Mr. Sothorn and Miss Marlowe will not be seen in New York city this spring, and as they will not act next season, their engagement in Newark marks their last appearance in this vicinity until the autumn of 1923. Their tour ends at the Lyric Theater in Philadelphia on April 28.

Attractions in the Brooklyn Theaters

Philip Klein will present "Lady Bug," a farce by Frances Nordstrom, with John Cumberland and Marie Nordstrom heading the cast, at the Majestic Theater the coming week. The play, which plays in this city for the first time, deals with a feminine fadist.

Out of deference to the scruples of a large number of his regular patrons Louis F. Werba, manager and lessee of the Montauk Theater, announces that the playhouse will be "dark" next week (Holy Week). The following week he will bring back for a brief engagement "Lightnin'."

"Bringing Up Father," the musical show based on George McManus's cartoons, comes to Teller's Shubert Theater. Beside Barricade, movie star, will appear in person at the Orpheum in a sketch. Others will be "Stars of Yesterday," the Weaver brothers and Rae Eleanor Ball.

BURLESQUE AT COLUMBIA.

"Harvest Time" is the title of the new two act burlesque that will be given at the Columbia Theater this coming week. It is described as having clean fun, new vaudeville specialties and an extensive display of scenery and costumes. The cast of comedians, singers and dancers is headed by Bert Brand, who has the assistance of Harry G. La Van, Gene Schuller, Gertrude Ralston and Dot Barnette.

Did You Hear . . . ?

That Ed Wynn Is a Better Mind Reader Than He Thought He Was?

By LUCIEN CLEVES.

ED WYNN received the other day a letter which interested the comedian so much that he has so far forgotten to show it to his press agent. The writer was a sailor who somewhat more than a month ago sat in the balcony of the Cohan Theater with a messmate to witness "The Perfect Fool." Like the rest of the spectators, he was absorbed in Wynn's mind reading stunt. He picked up his ears when he heard the comedian tell a man in an orchestra seat that he was going to Nassau the next day. So he listened intently to hear the name of the packet on which he was to make the journey. His own boat was sailing the next morning. The sailor wondered if the fellow downstairs was to be a passenger on her.

But it took a long time to get the name of the vessel. Wynn improvised observations while he struggled with his assistant to get the name. The signal repeatedly eluded him. He could not read the key, hard as the confederate down in the audience tried to tip him off. "You're going on a voyage," the comedian said. "I know that all right. I also know you're going to have a hard time."

Wynn was only sparring for time while this prophecy was made. He wanted to know what to call the boat. Finally he got the key from his aid; he called out the name accurately and passed on to another problem. Wynn forgot the incident. He might, indeed, never have thought of it again but for a letter that came to him at the theater. It was from the sailor who, with his pal, had sat in the balcony on a date he

named. He mentioned the trick and the name of his boat.

"I asked the next day," he wrote, "and found there was no such name on the passenger list. I never thought again of the matter until I heard one morning that a passenger had been found dead in his berth. I asked the name, and it was the fellow you talked to that night in the theater. He had taken passage so late that his name was not on the passenger list, and for that reason I could not find out if he was on board when I asked about him first. I am writing to ask you if you really knew anything certain when you said he was going to have a hard time, if anything was going to happen to him, or was that just a part of the trick?" Mr. Wynn is also wondering.

Salaries Will Go Down.

The organization of various cooperative companies, the difficulty in finding any kind of regular employment and the other hardships that the actors have encountered this season will, in the opinion of at least one manager with large interests in the city, force the reduction of salaries of players for the future.

"The days of the inflated compensation of actors are pretty well past, in my opinion," this manager said to the reporter of The New York Herald, "for they have seen from experience how difficult it is for any of them really to draw the amounts they have been claiming. If a play appeals to the public the attendance will be good. If it is not to the taste of playgoers the piece will fall. I only wish you could really know the receipts to which two popular women stars just now in this city are playing every week. They have been so low for the last month that they would astonish you. The managers are holding on in the hope that Easter may bring an improvement. If it does not, out they go."

"Yet they have to pay an expensive company, which is not improving matters in the least. Actors in cooperative companies are earning in some cases less than half they demand from managers. If they were worth what they say they would be drawing the money to the theatre. Take it from me, there has been a readjustment of values this winter which is going to have its influence."

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Theatrical Calendar.

TO-NIGHT.

FORTY-NINTH STREET THEATRE—Special performance of Nikita Balieff's Chauve Souris for the benefit of starving Russian artists of the theater and their families.

MONDAY.

VANDERBILT THEATRE—Oliver Morosco presents Miss Charlotte Greenwood in a new musical comedy entitled "Letty Pepper." In her support are Ray Raymond, Misses Jane and Mary King and Frances Victory, Master Gabriel and Miss Josie Intropoli. The book is by Morosco and George V. Hobart, based on a story by Charles Klein. The lyrics are by Leo Wood and Irving Blinn and the music by Werner Janzen.

THURSDAY.

WINTER GARDEN—Lee and J. J. Shubert will bring this house back to the legitimate for the summer with Eddie Cantor in a revue, "Make It Snappy," featuring Miss Nan Halperin. Book and lyrics are by Harold Atteridge, with additional lyrics by Al Bryan. Music is by Jean Schwartz. Cantor will appear in white face. Others in the company will be Miss Lillian Fitzgerald, Lew Hearn, Joe Opp, J. Harold Murray and Teddy Webb.

SATURDAY.

JOLSON'S THEATRE—"De Wolf Hopper's Funmakers," headed by the noted comedian, will present a revue combining all phases of entertainment, from musical comedy through drama to grand opera, called "Some Party." Included in the cast are William Courtleigh, William B. Mack, Jefferson De Angelis, Lew Dockstader, Misses Percy Maxwell, Nanette Flack and Louise Mackintosh, Bert Weir, Sam Ash, Herbert Waterous, Harry C. Brown, John Henshaw, John Hendricks, Misses Primrose Caryll and Virginia Futrelle, Billy Grant and Miss Ruth Adair.